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Mengele is linked in CIA papers to drug trafficking in Paraguay

By Paul Horvitz
Inquirer Staff Writer

WASHINGTON — The CIA received but apparently discounted reports during the 1970s that Josef Mengele, the hunted Nazi death-camp doctor, was engaged in narcotics trafficking in Paraguay, according to government documents made public yesterday.

The agency's Strategic Narcotics Team prepared an article on the purported drug link for a narcotics journal, but in 1979 the CIA's special assistant for coordination of foreign narcotics information concluded that the article, "although a tantalizing bit of information, is based on very circumstantial and unsubstantiated evidence and does not warrant publication as finished intelligence," one CIA memorandum says.

Twenty-eight pages of letters and memos, heavily censored by the CIA, were released at a news conference yesterday by two Republican Senators, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Alfonse M. D'Amato of New York.

They requested the documents on behalf of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a group that studies war crimes, said Martin Mendelsohn, an attorney for the center.

One 1972 memo appears to concern information supplied to the CIA by a "petty criminal" in Paraguay who hid at a farm residence in the town of Encarnacion. The home was purportedly owned by a person named Mengele who was using the name Dr. Henrique Wollman, the memo indicates.

"Report suggests he and others heavily involved in narcotics traffic," the memo says.

Mendelsohn said the documents represented the first public indication that Mengele might have been involved in drug trafficking.

A 1979 memo shows that the CIA asked the Customs Service and the Drug Enforcement Administration to conduct "tracers" on Mengele. The memo said Mengele "is believed to be hiding in Paraguay, where he reportedly lives under the protection of President Alfredo Stroessner."

The customs and drug agencies responded that they had no information on file about Mengele or his aliases, according to letters released by the CIA.

The two senators appeared to place greater credence in the reports than the CIA did in 1979. D'Amato declared that the declassified material provided "very good evidence that in the last decade and a half that Mengele has been supporting himself by international drug tafficking."

Both criticized the CIA for what they said was a "lack of diligence" in following up drug-connection leads.

"Nobody really gives a damn about Nazi war criminals," said Specter, adding that "the acts of omission" in the CIA's pursuit of information on Mengele amounted to protection of Mengele.

Kathy Pherson, a spokeswoman for the CIA, declined to draw any conclusions about the meaning of the documents.

Mengele, a former Nazi SS officer, was the chief doctor at the Auschwitz death camp during the last half of World War II. He is wanted on murder charges by the West German government.

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